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# WAS GERMANY DEFEATED IN 1918?

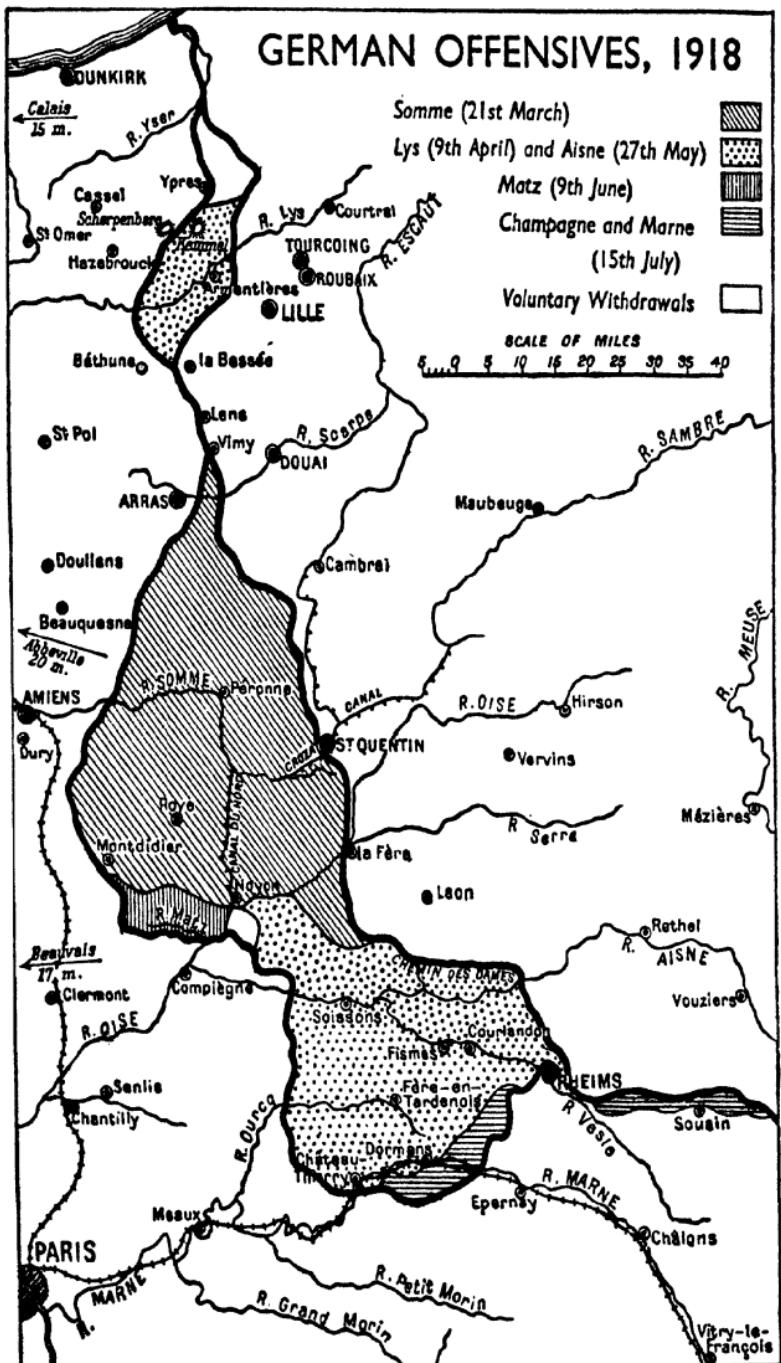
By CYRIL FALLS



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OXFORD PAMPHLETS  
ON WORLD AFFAIRS

# GERMAN OFFENSIVES, 1918



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WAS GERMANY  
DEFEATED IN  
1918?

BY  
CYRIL FALLS

OXFORD  
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS  
1940

THE chief aim of German propaganda for many years past has been to assail the Treaty of Versailles. At the same time, and with equal insistence, the Germans have set themselves to persuade the outer world, as well as their own people, that Germany was never defeated in the military sense in 1918. ‘The German Army was and is invincible. Germany in 1918 was betrayed, “stabbed in the back” by Jews and Communists. Had it not been for this treachery on the home front, the army could have fought on to victory.’

In this Pamphlet Captain Cyril Falls describes the campaigns of 1918, the circumstances leading up to the signing of the Armistice, and the terms of that Armistice. On the evidence of the German Commanders themselves Germany was utterly defeated by military force.

Captain Cyril Falls is the Military Correspondent of *The Times*. In the last war he served in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, on the General Staff, and as Liaison Officer with the French. From 1923 to 1939 he was employed on the official military history of the war. His most recent unofficial work is a biography of Marshal Foch, published in 1939, from which the two end-paper sketches in this pamphlet are taken by kind permission of the publishers, Messrs. Blackie and Sons Ltd.

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## WAS GERMANY DEFEATED IN 1918?

### I. THE 'STAB IN THE BACK'

In his speech on 8 November 1939 Hitler declared: 'Britain and France did not defeat us on the battle-field. That was a great lie.' The power of the spoken and written word will not be underestimated in these days, when propaganda ranks equally with the bomber and the machine-gun as a weapon. The statement that Germany was not defeated in 1918 but was 'betrayed', or, less crudely, that the German Army was not defeated but was stabbed in the back by the disaffection of the homeland, is an instance of propaganda at its most successful. It was directed first of all to Germany herself, to repair the prestige of her beaten forces and the spirit of a vanquished nation. It was cleverly and insistently applied, and its effect became apparent long before the Nazi Revolution destroyed freedom of thought. It next began to make its mark in the outer world, especially in Great Britain, though French national pride rejected it. Some British writers lent themselves only too readily to its purposes. It took various forms: Germany was tricked into peace by President Wilson; Germany was starved into surrender by the blockade; Germany was betrayed by the Socialists and Communists—the Nazis added, by the Jews.

The answer to these inconsistent statements is that in fact Germany was forced to sue for an armistice by defeat inflicted upon her and her

Allies, and that President Wilson had nothing to do either with her necessities or with the terms imposed upon her, though he was concerned with the transmission of her plea; that the blockade—a legitimate weapon which she had striven to counter by the illegitimate weapon of unrestricted submarine war—was only a contributing factor, though a powerful one, in her defeat; and that no move was made by Socialists or Communists until that defeat had been accomplished. It may be added that any weakening which occurred in German troops serving or having served in the East through infection with Bolshevism was largely due to Germany's own action in encouraging the spread of Bolshevism in Russia and especially in sending Lenin into the country in a sealed train, like a microbe in a glass tube.

### Causes contributing to Germany's Defeat

Many causes contributed to the defeat, as has been the case in most wars. The blockade played a great part. It deprived Germany of vital necessities such as rubber, so that at the end of the war the wheels of her mechanical vehicles were largely shod with iron, which reduced their pace and ruined the roads. In 1918 the home population went definitely short of food, and even the Army, which got the best of everything, could not eat to the satisfaction of hunger. The military ration was adequate to enable the troops to perform their duty, but no more. Ernst Jünger, who is not only one of the most brilliant but also one of the most honest of German writers on the personal and psychological side of the war, mentions that his company

had not the energy to play a game of football when out of the line. Several other writers have described how eagerly the men cut steaks from horses killed by artillery fire. The blockade also accentuated the effects of the vast consumption of resources by the war machine, which resulted in failure of the economic machine to keep pace with the needs of the country.

Yet it is as great a fallacy to say that Germany was defeated by the blockade as to say that she remained undefeated. Among other causes were the greater inventiveness of the Allies in the production and use of weapons. The rolling or creeping barrage, the tank, smoke-shell as a screen, indirect machine-gun fire, all stand to their credit. The employment of gas, against the recognized usages of war, was, it is true, a German invention, but it was one which Germany was singularly ill advised to initiate in view of the prevalence of westerly and south-westerly winds, and it was turned against her with deadly effect.

The defeat of Germany's Allies in the field, especially that of Bulgaria, hastened the end, but not before that had become virtually inevitable. The Allies' propaganda was more effective than the German. Their man-power was far superior, though there was a period between the defection of Russia and the effective entry of the Army of the United States into the struggle when their forces in the West were inferior.

### **The German Army was Defeated in the Field**

But the defeat of Germany was above all what the Germans have so persistently denied, a defeat

in the field. The great series of reverses suffered by the German armies during the final 'Battles of the Hundred Days' were led up to and conditioned by the attrition to which those armies were subjected in 1916 and 1917, and by the exhaustion and loss caused by their own offensive in early 1918. It was not the blockade, still less Jewish influence, which reduced the German forces to a mere framework; it was the shell and the bullet, surrender, and to a fairly large extent desertion. A quarter of the Army was captured by the Allies in the Battles of the Hundred Days, not to speak of possibly another quarter killed or wounded. Again, the Germans were driven behind their last prepared line of defence. Why did they not retreat to their frontier, or even to the Rhine, where the Allies could not have effectively attacked them before the spring? The answer is, because they could not. They had been forced back into a position in which, strategically speaking, they were cut in two by the barrier of the Ardennes, and their lateral communications were hopelessly blocked. They could not go on fighting on the retreat. They fought to the last, but had to submit to avoid complete catastrophe.

It was only when defeat became certain that revolution raised its head. Revolution was, indeed, the consequence, not the cause, of defeat. Before proving the truth of this statement by the admissions of German political and military leaders, it will be worth while to sketch briefly the events of 1918, a summary of which will reveal the plight in which the German armies found themselves in that November. But first let us recall the vivid phrase

of General Mordacq, which so well expresses the naked truth:

'It was only in November that the German Armies received the famous dagger thrust dealt by the Socialists, in a truly German fashion. But this dagger thrust was no longer necessary, because the Allies had already administered it, and that straight to the heart.'

## 2. THE ALLIED VICTORIES OF 1918

The Battle of the Somme not only weakened the German Army but also scared the German commanders. Falkenhayn had always, so to speak, been fighting for a favourable draw. His real successor, Ludendorff—for Hindenburg's influence, though vital, was chiefly in the moral sphere—as a result of what he saw on his arrival on the Western Front, came to the conclusion that defeat was inevitable if the war lasted. 'We were completely exhausted on the Western Front,' he says, and again: 'The Army had been fought to a standstill and was utterly worn out.' But he had the gambler's temperament and would never fight for a draw. He therefore allied himself with the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral von Holtzendorff, who guaranteed that unrestricted submarine warfare, if begun on 1 February 1917, would force Britain to sue for peace before 1 August. At the same time he prepared the famous rear line of defence, the Hindenburg Line or *Siegfried-Stellung*, as a precaution. He also instituted a new system of defence in depth, which without a shadow of doubt saved Germany from collapse in 1917.

Thanks largely to his tactical genius but also to the defection of Russia and to Allied blunders, the

German Army survived the offensives of Arras, the Aisne, Messines, Ypres, Malmaison, and Cambrai. After the Armistice of Brest-Litovsk the Germans obtained superiority of numbers on the Western Front, and again the gambler's spirit possessed the First Quartermaster-General. The U-boat campaign, successful as it had been, had declined without obtaining the promised decision. Now he would rout the Allied armies before the Americans could intervene effectively.

### The German Offensive in 1918

The great German offensives beginning on 21 March 1918 dealt the Allies a series of shattering blows, but once again they failed to bring about a decision. Though the sanguine were thrilled by their success, the more prudent saw danger all the time beneath the brilliant façade of victory. 'The Supreme Command is not telling the truth,' said one. 'Foch has something up his sleeve; he is not merely darning holes. From his writings I know the military genius of Foch too well to believe that.' 'Germany's military situation is brilliant—and hopeless,' was another striking phrase uttered in the midst of triumphs. 'Before you take your last horse out of the stable, make an end,' said Max of Baden to Hindenburg. Even in June, before the first Allied counter-stroke had been delivered, there were 'many desertions'.

The four German offensives of the Somme (21 March), the Lys (9 April), the Aisne (27 May), and the Matz (9 June) were, however, great tactical successes, and if they failed in their strategic object they yet achieved considerable strategic advantages.

The Paris-Châlons railway, the main east-and-west artery, was cut at Château-Thierry. The Amiens-Paris railway was brought under artillery fire. The northern system about Hazebrouck was dislocated. The Allied armies were subjected to a strain which in all the three major offensives—for the Matz hardly counts as such—threatened to become unbearable. If German strategy had been on a par with German tactics the results might have been still more serious, in fact, catastrophic. The most fatal error of all was the following-up of an unexpectedly easy tactical success in the Aisne offensive. It had been undertaken mainly with the object of drawing in and defeating the French reserves, which had already twice moved to the aid of the British and so interfered with Ludendorff's plans. It should have been broken off directly that was accomplished and the heavy artillery immediately transferred to the north for a renewed assault upon the British in Flanders.

### The Allies take the Initiative

Yet all the time Marshal Foch had in fact something up his sleeve—though at moments not much. He was not merely darning holes. He had planned counter-strokes against the flanks of the Château-Thierry salient, which were to be delivered on 18 July if the enemy had not attacked by then. The enemy did attack first, on the 15th, and made dangerous progress south of the Marne, but the blow of Foch was none the less delivered according to programme, and the French won their first victory of 1918. By the end of July the Germans had evacuated the salient and fallen back to the

Aisne and the Vesle. The capture of 30,000 prisoners and 800 guns, and the freeing of the main eastern railway, were the fruits of the second victory of the Marne.

This blow was a successful counter-stroke which nullified the effects of the German victory on the Aisne. In itself it amounted to no more than that, and Marshal Foch in his memoirs does not even include it among the Allied offensives. Yet it had one very far-reaching effect. It put the initiative into the hands of the Allies, whose strength was growing owing to the rapid arrival of American troops. Ludendorff for a time still hoped to launch his offensive against the British, but he had to weaken the reserves which he had assembled for the purpose, and he was never given an opportunity to reassemble them. And this passing of the initiative from the hands of Ludendorff to those of Foch was of immense importance because for the time being a number of factors which it would take too long to discuss combined to give the attack predominance over the defence, whichever side was the attacker.

The next Allied offensive was launched on 8 August, with the initial object of freeing the Amiens-Paris railway. It opened with a brilliant success, the Canadian Corps advancing six miles on the first day. When resistance stiffened at the gates of Roye the attack was transferred farther north and a great British assault launched on 21 August reached Bapaume on the 25th. Simultaneously a strong French attack south of the Oise gained valuable ground north of Soissons. On the 26th the battle-front was extended still farther

north by the British, who advanced from Arras. The Germans immediately abandoned the Roye line and fell back to the Somme and the Canal du Nord.

They were given no respite. The British broke through the famous Drocourt-Quéant Line or *Wotan-Stellung* on 2 September, and the enemy began a further series of withdrawals on a wide front to the Aisne near Vailly, Saint-Simon, and Gouzeaucourt. He also abandoned the gains he had made in the Lys offensive in Flanders, thus freeing the Hazebrouck railway system. About 130,000 prisoners and 1,800 guns had been captured in seven weeks of the counter-offensive.

The next move was made far away to the south-east, when the American Army attacked at Saint-Mihiel on 12 September, overran the German salient, took 16,000 prisoners and 450 guns, and freed the Paris-Avricourt railway.

### Allied Strategy

Hitherto the offensives, great as they were, had been of local nature, with the object of freeing railways and of eliminating the big salients in the German front. Henceforward a new type of strategy, suggested by Haig to Foch and welcomed by the latter, came into operation. It did not seek either of the immemorial roads to victory, the turning of a flank or a break-through. It was based upon the lie of the German communications. All the main railways on which the enemy relied to maintain his front from the Channel to Rheims converged on Liège, where they passed through a

bottle-neck between the Dutch frontier and the Ardennes. The Ardennes, an area of steep ridges and deep-cut valleys, heavily forested and nearly 500 square miles in extent, was crossed by only one double-line railway of limited capacity. South of this great barrier the Germans disposed of a railway of first-class importance, which linked with the northern system at Hirson and ran through Mézières to Thionville, Metz, and Luxemburg. Important as it was, it would not bear the whole weight of a German retirement. The design was therefore to carry out a rapid advance against the vital rail (and road) junctions in the Douai plain, especially Aulnoye and Hirson, and simultaneously to thrust towards Mézières in order to prevent the enemy using for the purposes of reinforcement or retirement the lines north and west of it connecting with the main system through Liège. If this strategy were successful the enemy would be unable either to continue an effective resistance or to retreat. In addition Foch arranged another great offensive by British, Belgians, and French in Flanders with the object of first capturing the Passchendaele Ridge and then advancing upon the railway junctions of Ghent and Bruges in order to drive the enemy off the Flemish coast.

Franco-American forces were to lead off with the attack towards Mézières on 26 September; two British armies were to begin a thrust towards Cambrai on the 27th; the Flanders offensive was to start on the 28th; and on the 29th the right British Army and that on the French left were to attack in the direction of Saint-Quentin.

### The Allies resume their Offensives

The right attack started well, but soon met with fierce resistance on difficult ground, a resistance which justified Haig's judgement, because it showed how sensitive was the enemy to any threat in that quarter. Haig's own blow next day was, however, far more decisive. The Canal du Nord was passed, the Hindenburg Line was breached, and the British stood on the outskirts of Cambrai by the following evening. On the 29th the attack towards Saint-Quentin was almost equally successful. The British breached the Hindenburg Line on this front also. In four days' fighting, from the 27th to the 30th, more prisoners were taken than were captured by the Germans in their four days of most overwhelming success from the 27th to the 30th of May on the Aisne. Excluding the captures of Débeney's French First Army, the British Fourth, Third, and First Armies, with two American divisions, took 48,500 prisoners and 630 guns.

The Flanders offensive also went well, and on the second day, 29th September, the British and Belgians reached the Messines and Passchendaele Ridges. This ground, however, constituted the most tortured and shattered battle-field in France, and it was the ground rather than the Germans which, by rendering it impossible to keep up the ammunition supply, now held up the advance. Despite the urging of Foch, it was impossible to renew the offensive in this quarter for another fortnight.

The first week of October was occupied on the greater part of the front by preparations or by

following up German withdrawals. The forces most heavily engaged were those of the Americans, who made a series of short advances in face of hard opposition and frequent counter-attacks.

It was, however, natural that the Germans should resist foot by foot in this area, where they could afford to abandon no ground voluntarily. The pressure of the Americans and of the French Army on their left, following upon the breach of the Hindenburg Line and combined with a further thrust of the Allied centre between Saint-Quentin and Cambrai, brought about a rapid German withdrawal beyond Laon and north of the Oise to the neighbourhood of Le Cateau.

### Headlong German Retreat

Meanwhile in the north communications had been more or less re-established, and on 14 October British, Belgians, and French advanced to the assault between the Lys and a distance of ten miles from the coast. Their success was followed by the most spectacular, indeed sensational, retreat of the war. The enemy abandoned Ostend and fell back so fast that by the 20th the Belgians had reached the Dutch frontier. The Flemish coast was lost to the Germans. South of the Lys they retired even more precipitately, abandoning the industrial cities of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing and continuing their retreat to the Escaut or Scheldt.

This latter withdrawal was hastened by yet another thrust of the Allied centre, begun on 17 October, and known as the Battle of the Selle, in which the three British armies concerned captured over 20,000 prisoners and 450 guns. Blow

followed blow. On 1 November a final series of attacks led to further withdrawals. But Aulnoye junction was now under heavy fire and lateral movement of large forces had become impossible to the Germans. Though some formations still fought stoutly—if not in the old style—others gave way rapidly, sometimes being seen to fall back in front of the Allied barrage fire. There were many deserters among the prisoners, and, as we learnt from them, many more who skulked in towns behind the front or refused to return from leave. The roads were choked with transport.

### The Germans sue for an Armistice

The Allies had their troubles, and were checked by transport difficulties, but were prepared to form mobile columns in order to continue the pursuit. A big fleet of bombers was ready to be launched against the Ruhr. In addition Foch had mounted a large-scale offensive east of the Meuse, which would turn the line of that river in case the Germans fell back upon it, though as a matter of fact it is doubtful whether they were any longer in a condition to do so. This attack was to have been carried out on 14 November, but it was not required. In the early hours of the 7th a message was received by Foch giving the names of the plenipotentiaries whom the German Government desired should pass through the French lines in order to sue for an armistice. So great was the confusion behind the German lines that the party did not reach Rethondes, near Compiègne, till the following morning. The Armistice was signed at 5.10 a.m. on the 11th, and hostilities ceased at 11 a.m.

The captures of the Allies in the Battles of the Hundred Days were as follows:

		<i>Prisoners</i>	<i>Guns</i>
British	.	186,000	2,800
French	.	120,000	1,700
Americans	.	43,000	1,400
Belgians	.	14,000	500
Total	.	<u>363,000</u>	<u>6,400</u>

Those figures represent a quarter of the Army in men and half the guns. If the captures of the Second Battle of the Marne be added the total is not far short of 400,000 men and 7,200 guns. The extent of the victory cannot, however, be measured thus. To appreciate that we have to turn to what had passed in governmental circles and in the High Command since the Allies crashed through the German defences in the morning mist of 8 August.

### 3. BEHIND THE GERMAN SCENE

As the news of that 'black day of the German Army' trickled in, a wave of depression struck Berlin. People had an inkling of what had happened but they did not know the whole truth. 'Acts were reported to me', writes Ludendorff, 'which I should not have deemed possible in the German Army . . . troops falling back cried out to a fresh division marching bravely to the attack: "Strike breakers!"' Whether or not he had the right to reproach men whom he had tried so highly is beside the point. His words at least give a vivid impression of the extent of the defeat.

#### Demoralization

And what he wrote he said at the time. On 13 August Colonel von Haeften, the liaison officer

between the Government and the High Command, learnt from his own lips that he had lost confidence in the troops. The men, he said, could no longer be depended on, and Germany therefore needed peace quickly. While they were talking Hindenburg, who was about to meet the Chancellor, Hertling, and the Foreign Minister, Hintze, entered the room. 'What shall I tell them?' Haeften heard him ask Ludendorff. 'The whole truth,' was the answer. At the Crown Council which followed Ludendorff declared that the war could not be won by force of arms; all that could be done was to hold the enemy in check by defensive tactics. He wanted to gain time for a 'psychological attack' to be made upon the British home front. This time the Germans have not made the mistake of waiting to launch that form of attack until defeat stares them in the face.

The view of the most important and able of the three Army Group Commanders, Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, was similar. 'I no longer believe', he wrote on the 15th, 'that we can hold out over the winter; it is even possible that a catastrophe will occur earlier. . . . What we must therefore do, if we are to avoid a military disaster which will ruin our whole future as a nation, is to make haste to approach our enemies, and especially England, with peace offers.'

The succession of shocks continued. On 14 September the Austrian peace offer was issued; on the 26th Bulgarian *parlementaires* entered the Allied lines to sue for an armistice. On the Western Front, said Ludendorff, the troops were still holding out—but to-morrow?

### The Appeal to President Wilson

His question was answered by the smashing blows which have already been described. They appeared to the High Command to be absolutely fatal. On 29 September, on its own initiative and indeed to the consternation of the civil authorities —mark this—it informed the Emperor that an immediate appeal must be made to President Wilson to use his mediation to bring about an armistice.

Next day the Chancellor, Hertling, resigned. His 'democratic' successor, Prince Max of Baden, fought with tooth and nail against the decision. But no, it had to be made. 'I want to save my army,' said Ludendorff. Max of Baden strove to bring Ludendorff to agree that at least only a peace offer should be issued, not coupled with a demand for an armistice. But Ludendorff insisted, and the double appeal was sent out over the signature of the Chancellor during the night of 3 October. Incidentally, it was intercepted and deciphered by the French within but little over twenty-four hours.

President Wilson's reply, received on the 9th, was non-committal. It demanded whether, in the event of his proposing a cessation of arms, the Central Powers would agree to withdraw from invaded territory. Before he answered this message Prince Max put to Ludendorff, who came to Berlin that day, a long questionnaire to ascertain if he dared refuse evacuation. Ludendorff was evasive but not quite so pessimistic as a few days earlier, because no great Allied offensive was at the moment in progress and he thought the pressure was

slackening. What he wanted was time, time to reorganize, after which he would defiantly refuse extreme terms in the hope that the Allies would not choose to sacrifice more men in order to enforce them. Such was the key to his policy while he retained his post.

However, on 12 October the German Foreign Office replied to the Government of the United States that it accepted the famous Fourteen Points enunciated by the President and agreed to evacuation. German hopes of gaining time were dashed by the American rejoinder, received on the 16th, which stated that the conditions of an armistice must be left to the judgement of the military advisers of the Allied Governments. The Note threw the Government into despair, but again no decision was taken till Ludendorff arrived to meet the War Cabinet next day. The First Quarter-master-General was in a truculent yet evasive mood. In war, he said, one needed 'the soldier's luck'; perhaps Germany would enjoy it once again. He wanted more troops transferred from the East, but admitted that they were tainted with Bolshevism, and would not say that such reinforcements could do more than postpone a catastrophe. He called for a further comb-out from industry. He talked of declining morale, desertion, grumbling about insufficient food. He urged that the people at home should be impressed with the view that if Germany held out winter would come to her aid, but could not say when the Allied attacks might be expected to cease. Again, he was simply playing for time, gambling, fencing with the remorseless logic of the Chancellor, who pointed out that the Allied strength

continued to grow swiftly with the arrival of the Americans. He left the Chancellor unconvinced by his pleading, and the latter decided that negotiations with President Wilson must continue. At the same time he determined to get rid of Ludendorff.

### The Sands run out

On 18 October Crown Prince Rupprecht stated that the troops were surrendering 'in hordes' in face of attack, that thousands of plunderers infested the bases, that there existed no more prepared lines, and that no more could be dug.

On 20 October the Turks opened negotiations with the Allies. The Turkish Armistice was not actually signed till the 30th, but by then, save for a small action at Haritan, north of Aleppo, on the 26th, Turkey had been to all intents and purposes out of the war for ten days.

On 26 October Ludendorff resigned or was dismissed—the difference is purely technical—to be later succeeded by Groener.

On 28 October Austria, whose armies on the Italian front had dissolved in complete and irretrievable rout, opened negotiations. The Austrian Armistice was concluded on 3 November.

Two exceptionally able commanders, Generals von Gallwitz and von Mudra, gave their views to the Cabinet on the 28th. They thought the Allied offensive was slackening, and the former declared that for the sake of national honour the struggle should be continued while the Army was capable of putting up a resistance. But in fact the only hope any of those present cherished was to use the remaining powers of resistance to get better terms.

Mudra regarded the situation as hopeless if Austria's surrender were unconditional and the Allies gained the disposal of her railways. From now onwards it began to be realized that the sole prospect of making the people fight to their last breath, or alternatively perhaps of securing easier terms, was to sacrifice the Kaiser and the Crown Prince. Pressure to secure an abdication began.

On 29 and 30 October there was trouble at Wilhelmshaven. The crews of certain warships refused to put to sea, because they believed that their commanders intended to sacrifice the whole High Seas Fleet in a blind attack upon the British Grand Fleet. Actually Admiral Scheer had intended to take the offensive, though he tried to deny this after the mutiny. This first outbreak was checked, but the whole Navy was in fact rotten. The flame of revolt, fanned by fear, soon spread once more, and by 4 November Kiel was in the hands of mutineers.

On 5 November Groener, Ludendorff's successor as First Quartermaster-General, paid an unconscious tribute to the strategic plan of the Allies, Haig's part in which has been mentioned. The railway situation, he stated, was already critical, and any further withdrawal meant practically the end of all quick transfers of troops behind the front. Then he proceeded to emphasize his appreciation of Haig's perspicacity, though of course without realizing the part Haig had played in forming the plan. He could not answer the question as to how long the Army could hold out for negotiations; it all depended on the enemy's pressure, especially at a danger-point north of Verdun. (Three weeks earlier Ludendorff had expressed a similar anxiety.)

What he feared was the American advance on Mézières. Later on he was to write: 'In any case we were too late with our retirement to the Antwerp-Meuse line—the more so because a few days later the great danger which I had foreseen began to take shape. . . . After the 1st November the Americans kept advancing further and further.' Next day, 6 November, largely because of the continued advance on Mézières, though partly also owing to the spread of the naval revolt, he told the Chancellor that the white flag must cross the lines. 'But not for a week at least?' asked Prince Max. 'A week is too long,' replied Groener.

Meanwhile the Germans had picked up a message from the Allies to President Wilson, dispatched on the 4th, in which they stated that they accepted his Fourteen Points, with two reserves, as a basis for peace. We are not concerned with the peace or the Fourteen Points, but with the defeat of Germany and the Armistice, so that it is necessary only to note that the reservations concerned, first, certain interpretations placed on the phrase 'freedom of the seas', and, secondly, his phrase 'restoration' of evacuated territories, which they took to include compensation to the populations for the damage due to aggression.

At 7 a.m. on 8 November the German plenipotentiaries arrived at Rethondes, where Marshal Foch awaited them in his train, parked in a siding constructed for a big gun on a railway mounting.

#### 4. THE ARMISTICE

The German delegation was headed by Herr Erzberger, Secretary of State. The other pleni-

potentiaries were Count Oberndorff, General von Winterfeldt, and the naval Captain von Vanselow. Winterfeldt was only a liaison officer between the Supreme Command and the Government and was chosen by the Chancellor, so that actually the Army was not represented. Was this a mistake on the part of the Allies? One acute observer has declared that it was, because it allowed the subsequent plea to be made that the Army itself had not been a suitor to the Allies. It was, M. Benoist-Mâchin points out, not the Army but Prince Max who opened negotiations, not the Army but Herr Erzberger who concluded them. Actually, this life-belt to the Army was not much more than a straw to a drowning man; for Erzberger afterwards admitted that Hindenburg told him he must accept any conditions. But at the time the point was of significance and it has since had its propaganda value. Prince Max, who throughout sacrificed himself for the prestige of the Army, fully recognized its importance. 'Our prevailing feeling,' he remarks, 'was one of relief that at least the *Army* would not have to wait upon Foch.'

The delegates presented their credentials and took their seats at the table in the saloon carriage. Erzberger then began with what may have been mere clumsiness, though it wore the appearance of typical German bluff. He had come, he said, to receive the proposals of the Allied Powers with a view to an armistice. Foch brought him to a full stop. He declared that he had no proposals. If they sought an armistice he would read out to them the conditions which the Allied Governments were prepared to grant. Erzberger and Oberndorff then

stated that the German Government sought an armistice, and the Marshal read the terms. Winterfeldt requested in the name of the German Government that there should be a cessation of hostilities before a decision was reached. The Marshal was not empowered to accord any suspension of arms; in any case, though unaware of German plans to gain time and then perhaps resume hostilities in more favourable circumstances, he knew with whom he had to deal. He refused.

There followed a period of fencing on the part of the delegation. Erzberger spoke of Bolshevism and hinted that it might afflict the French armies, though he took care to give Foch no notion of the enormous strides it was even now making in Germany. Foch replied that Bolshevism was a malady of defeated armies and nations worn out by fighting. The delegates also asked for an extension of twenty-four hours beyond 11 November, the final date fixed by the Allied Governments for a reply. This was refused, but the Marshal offered to expedite the dispatch of a messenger. The Germans also raised the question of peace terms, but the Marshal was instructed by telephone from Paris that on no account should he engage in such discussion. Finally, they accepted the conditions in principle, but reserved to themselves the right to make certain observations upon them and to refer them to their Government. They actually sent a summary by wireless and dispatched a staff officer with the complete text.

The observations were presented next day, the 9th. Marshal Foch made scarcely any concessions, but he did accord a little extra time for the evacua-

tion of invaded territory, on the ground that it would be physically impossible to carry this out within the limit already laid down. He also cut down slightly the number of machine-guns to be surrendered. On the 10th he reminded the plenipotentiaries that they must sign on the morrow or not at all, and urged them to obtain a reply from the Chancellor.

At 8 p.m. the delegation received a radio-telegram in cipher from Hindenburg, urging that if possible a modification on certain points should be obtained, but adding that in any case the armistice convention must be signed. At 10.30 p.m. there arrived a further telegram, *en clair*, which ran: 'The German Government accepts the armistice conditions offered to it on the 8th November Reichskanzler Schluss'

The French had meanwhile learnt of the Emperor's abdication. 'Is this a new Chancellor, this Schluss?' asked the interpreter. 'We have never heard his name.' Erzberger answered that 'Schluss' meant 'final stop', and added: 'And it will be a final stop so far as the Chancellor is concerned.'

For the moment neither he nor Foch realized what lay behind this comic incident. Prince Max had resigned on the 9th, to be succeeded as Chancellor by Ebert, but that night the old hierarchy had collapsed beneath the weight of revolution. Ebert was now only 'President of the Council of the People's Commissaries' and had technically no right to sign as Chancellor. In fact the telegram had been sent by the General Staff. However, it represented the views of such auth-  
there was never any question o

The convention was signed at 5.10 a.m. on 11 November. The following is a summary of the terms:

*Western Front*

- I. Hostilities to cease at 11 a.m. on 11 November.
- II. Evacuation of invaded territories, including Alsace-Lorraine, within 14 days.
- III. Repatriation of inhabitants of these territories.
- IV. Surrender of 5,000 guns, 30,000 machine-guns, 3,000 trench mortars, 2,000 aircraft.
- V. Evacuation of left bank of Rhine; bridgeheads to be established by Allies on right bank.
- VI. No evacuation of inhabitants of these territories to be carried out and no damage to be done.
- VII. Communications to be left intact; 5,000 locomotives, 150,000 railway wagons, and 5,000 lorries to be handed over.
- VIII. Position of delay-action mines to be notified.
- IX. Allies to be given right of requisition in occupied territory.
- X. Repatriation, without reciprocity, of Allied prisoners of war.
- XI. Allied sick and wounded who cannot be evacuated to be cared for by German personnel.

*Eastern Frontiers of Germany*

- XII. All German troops to be withdrawn within old frontiers.
- XIII. All instructors and German prisoners of war to be recalled.
- XIV. All requisitioning to cease.
- XV. Treaties of Bucharest and Brest-Litovsk to be abandoned.
- XVI. Allies to have free access to territories evacuated by Germany on her eastern frontiers, in order either to convey supplies to their populations or to maintain order.

*East Africa*

XVII. Evacuation of German forces in East Africa within one month.

*General*

XVIII. Repatriation, without reciprocity, of civilians of Allied or Associated States other than those mentioned in Clause III.

XIX. Reparation to be made for damage done; funds seized in Belgium, Russia, and Rumania to be restored.

*Naval*

XX. Cessation of hostilities at sea. Location and moves of German ships to be notified.

XXI. Naval and mercantile prisoners of war of Allied and Associated Powers to be returned, without reciprocity.

XXII. All serviceable submarines to be handed over at certain specified ports.

XXIII. Germany to hand over for internment 10 battleships, 6 battle cruisers, 8 light cruisers, and 50 of the most modern destroyers; all other naval craft to be laid up and their crews paid off.

XXIV. The Allies to have the right to sweep up all minefields laid by Germany outside German territorial waters.

XXV. Allies to have freedom of access to the Baltic, for which purpose they may take over such German fortifications as they consider necessary.

XXVI. The existing blockade conditions to remain unchanged. The Allies contemplate provisioning Germany while the Armistice remains in force.

XXVII. All naval aircraft to be concentrated and immobilized in German bases.

XXVIII. In evacuating the Belgian coast, Germany to abandon all ships and harbour material.

- XXIX. Black Sea ports to be evacuated; Russian ships to be handed over to the Allies; merchant shipping to be released.
- XXX. All merchant ships belonging to the Allies to be restored in ports to be specified.
- XXXI. No destruction of ships to be carried out before evacuation, surrender, or restoration.
- XXXII. The German Government to notify the neutral Governments of the world that all restrictions placed on trading with the Allies have been cancelled.
- XXXIII. No transfers of German shipping to neutral flags to take place.

*Duration of Armistice*

- XXXIV. The duration of the Armistice to be 36 days, with option to extend. On failure of the execution of any clause the Armistice may be denounced by one party at 48 hours' notice.

*Time Limit for Reply*

- XXXV. This Armistice to be accepted or rejected by Germany within 72 hours of notification.

### Revolution in Germany

While these great events were in progress others of equal moment were happening in Germany and in the German Army. By 7 November the revolution begun at Kiel had spread as far as Brunswick and Cologne and had appeared also in the south at Munich. On the same day the Social Democrats in the Government demanded that forbidden revolutionary meetings should be permitted, and that the Emperor and Crown Prince should immediately renounce the throne. The Chancellor him-

self had been striving to bring this about constitutionally, but this move broke up the foundations of his policy. Next day the revolution continued its march and the Kaiser, who had taken refuge at head-quarters, refused to abdicate. In Berlin there were only three battalions of Jägers considered reliable. The Chancellor, honourable though perhaps not very strong man that he was, would hear of no *coup d'état* against his Emperor, though the Social Democrats in the Government told him that immediate abdication might yet stave off the revolution.

On the 9th the famous Jägers refused to move against the revolutionaries in Berlin; the Chancellor resigned; and the Kaiser abdicated 'as German Emperor but not as King of Prussia'. This was fatuous and according to the constitutional lawyers legally impossible, but in any case he had delayed too long. That afternoon Scheidemann proclaimed a republic from the steps of the Reichstag.

This is not the place to deal with the disintegration and collapse of the returning German Army or with the further spread and subsequent intensification of the revolutionary movement throughout Germany. It waxed and waned, burst out with redoubled violence, and was not stamped out entirely until May 1919. In that month the iron will of the ex-woodcutter, ex-carpenter Noske, Minister of National Defence, backed by the military skill and resolution of General Maercker and the fighting qualities of the *Freikorps* of volunteers from right-wing elements of the old army, extinguished the last flames with blood. In one week of March 1,200 civilians are said to

have been killed and 10,000 to have been injured in Berlin. Bavaria and Saxony, which had broken away and formed themselves into independent revolutionary republics, were brought back to the Reich by brute force in the same period.

### Advance of the Allied Armies

With all this the Allied armies had nothing to do. They marched slowly forward, hampered by the distance of their railheads, the state of the roads, the necessity of feeding the civil population despoiled by the Germans, and other difficulties. Not till mid-December were the great semicircular bridgeheads beyond the Rhine fully occupied. In the first instance there is no doubt that the propertied elements in the Rhineland found the presence of the detested victors not unwelcome as a protection from the orgy of murder and loot which swept over the cities of unoccupied Germany.

Much has been made by German apologists of the slowness of the Allied advance, conducted though it was under conditions which were virtually those of peace—though, of course, with full military precautions—and without expenditure of ammunition, the heaviest of military commodities. But, on the other hand, the German withdrawal was also painful, though the Germans had to park guns and lorries by the thousand in accordance with the terms of the Armistice, though they transported only a fraction of the ammunition carried by the Allies—in fact, only what was in the caissons and often not even that—and were thus relieved of the burden of all their

heaviest material. The German Army was not in a position to carry out a fighting retreat, certainly not without abandoning the greater proportion of its armament and stores. If, on the contrary, it had stood to fight, it would have been annihilated as a fighting force. Of this the evidence already given is surely ample proof.

### Conclusion

It has also been shown that the story of the Army being stabbed in the back by revolution is false.

To reach the kernel of reality we may, however, disregard to a great extent academic discussion of why and wherefore. In a modern authoritarian State revolution may be considered to be the inevitable accompaniment of defeat; one may almost say that revolution and defeat are one. Perhaps it is impossible for the social and political structure of any State with modern development to survive defeat; it may not even survive victory in a long and destructive national war.

It is puerile also to try to single out special causes. All weapons are used to inflict damage, and finance, propaganda, blockade are weapons like the rest. No nation understands this better than Germany, who began to develop methods of total war twenty-five years ago, though she did not then exploit them to anything like the extent which they have reached to-day in her hands. But of all these weapons blockade is the only one which could conceivably be decisive without the aid of military victory, and blockade can be based only upon the command of the sea, which is, as it has always been, one of the most important elements in victory. For example, would

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the German Navy have revolted before the German Army but for the Allied command of the Sea? The revolt at Kiel was simply one aspect of German defeat.

Yet in the last war our blockade, close and effective as it was, could not for geographical and even for political reasons be decisive in itself. Germany had also to be defeated on land, by force of arms, by attrition, by shock, by losses, and by being driven into a strategically untenable position. That, the one point which apologists and splitters of hairs strive to avoid or about which they create confusion, is the final and finite reality.

Germany was utterly defeated by military force in the year 1918.



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